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AUTHOR Dabbs, James M., Jr.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Present research explored whether crowding effects are caused by subjects or by those with whom they are crowded. In one experiment, 45 male, female, or mixed-sex pairs of subjects discussed a legal case, each pair seated first five feet apart and then almost touching. All subjects reacted more negatively when crowded with males than with females. In a second experiment 15 male and 15 female subjects gave creative uses for objects while seated close to or far from a mixed-sex pair of confederates. Subjects shifted eye contact from male to female when close, again regardless of their own sex. Findings suggest that in crowding, sex of partner may be more important than sex of self. (Author)

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Less Eye Contact When Closer?

Depends Upon Your Partner's Sex

James M. Dabbs, Jr.

Christina J. Johns Patricia H. Powell

Increasing closeness between people arouses characteristic patterns of behavior which are likely to be different for men and women. Crowded females tend to become friendly and positive toward one another, while crowded males bec me unfriendly and negative (Freedman, 1975). But perhaps we miss the point by attending exclusively to a single person's characteristic patterns of behavior. Each person sees, hears, and infers what the other is like, and each is affected by the other. Men and women elicit different reactions from other people, and it is not the same to be crowded with a man as with a woman.

Eye contact has also been shown to produce arousal, which should be greater when people are closer together. The combined effects of eye contact and crowding could produce an unpleasantly high degree of arousal. High eye contact in a crowded situation might produce the negative affect among males and positive among females. If negative affect is avoided in normal social exchange, during crowding eye contact with a male might be especially avoided.

Two experiments were conducted. The first was designed to explore sex differences in eye contact when crowded. Results indicated sex of partner was more important than sex of subject. The second experiment was performed to clarify these results and extend their generality.

Experiment I

In the first experiment, 15 male, 15 female, and 15 mixed sex dyads read and discussed a legal brief in an uncrowded condition (5 ft. apart)

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and in a crowded condition (knees almost touching). Dependent measures were questionnaire responses and an observational measure of eye contact. Subjects rated the quality of the discussion itself, their own feelings during the discussion, and the feelings they thought their partners had experienced. Two experimenters using an event recorder behind an observation mirror recorded eye contact for each subject of each pair, where looking at the face of the other was used to define a subject's "eye contact."

Reactions to crowding among male, female, and mixed sex pairs were first analyzed using the BMD 08V analysis of variance program. The analysis of sex composition of dyad (male, female, mixed) and distance (far, close) was based upon pair scores rather than individual scores. With crowding, eye contact dropped and subjects generally became more favorable, but in evaluating the discussion male pairs became less favorable than the other pairs. In a second analysis, we examined individual subjects rather than working with pair scores as the unit of analysis. Individual scores were cast into a 2 x 2 format, with each subject classified in terms of own sex and sex of partner. Each of the 90 subjects was classified as a male or female subject who had had a male or female partner. Within-subject measures were expressed as change scores from far to close rather than as two separate measures. In order to be conservative, given the unknown dependence between subjects run as pairs but analyzed as individuals, df for error were halved.

A dramatic and unexpected effect of sex became apparent with this analysis. Increases in positive evaluation and decreases in eye contact with crowding were due to the sex of subject's partners rather than subject's own sex. Subjects, regardless of their own sex, became significantly more

favorable when crowded with females than with males. They also tended to lower their eye contact less when crowded with females, although this effect was not statistically significant ($p<.10$). Sex of subject had no effect.

Experiment II

The first experiment employed a single discussion topic, required discussion in a contrived setting, and confounded the manipulation of distance with time. The second experiment was designed to take care of some of these weaknesses and test the generality of the effect observed. The experiment was built around a procedure which would examine simultaneously the effects of being crowded with a male and being crowded with a female. Subjects interacted at two distances with a pair of confederates, one male and one female. If subjects tend to look away from a male more than from a female when crowded, with a mixed sex dyad they should tend to shift their gaze from the male to the female. In the second experiment 15 male and 15 female subjects each talked with a mixed sex pair of confederates. Subjects were asked to tell the confederates creative uses for everyday objects while seated close to (1-1/2 ft.) or far from (6 ft.) the confederates. Subjects' eye contact with each confederate at each distance was recorded by an observer with a dichotomous event recorder behind an observation mirror.

Data were summarized to show percent of time each subject looked at each confederate at each distance. Mean percent of eye contact with male and female confederates at the two distance is shown in Table 1. The pattern fits our prediction: approximately equal eye contact with the two confederates at the far distance shifted to more eye contact with the female than with the male at the close distance. Statistical analysis of these data presented a problem. Scores are not statistically independent (looking at one confederate precluded looking at the other one at any

given moment), and subjects were highly variable in their mean scores. Because of these difficulties, we chose to analyze the data in a non-parametric fashion. Each subject was classified as to whether he or she showed a greater tendency to look at the female, as compared with the male, at the close than at the far distance. Twenty-one out of 30 subjects showed this pattern of increased preference for female over male eye contact at the close distance relative to the far distance ($p \leq .05$ by sign test). Male and female subjects did not differ from one another, with 10 out of 15 females and 11 out of 5 males showing the above pattern.

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Insert Table I about here

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Discussion

In the first experiment, male and female subjects did not differ in their reaction to crowding; subjects with male and female partners did differ. Crowding produced more positive affect and less drop in eye contact with female partners than with male partners. In the second experiment, subjects tended to shift gaze from a male to a female confederate when crowded. In neither experiment did sex of subject have any effect.

The present finding causes us to reinterpret findings reported by Freedman and others. Sex effects in the earlier studies occurred in same sex groups. The findings were discussed in terms of tendencies associated with sex of the other persons in the group, who happened to be of the same sex as the subject. When all sex combinations are run and each subject is monitored, it is possible to separate effects of subjects from effects of their partners.

Eye contact decreases when one is crowded, but it decreases more when crowded by a male than by a female. Males are larger, more aggressive, and generally more threatening than females. Reducing eye contact with an approaching male should reduce the subject's own arousal and serve as an appeasement gesture (Hutt & Ounstead, 1966), indicating that the subject intends no harm, wishes to precipitate no crisis.

An approaching male apparently arouses negative feelings, and we look away from him while we continue to look at an approaching female. This pattern qualifies the popular notion of Argyle and Dean (1965), who equated closeness with intimacy and argued that we maintain a balance of intimacy by reducing eye contact when the others move closer. We seem to accept closeness and intimacy with females while rejecting it with males. Perhaps what Argyle and Dean had in mind was not intimacy per se but certain negative connotations of intimacy--vulnerability, exposure, excessive closeness. With female partners, the negative connotations are fewer, and we react less against the intimacy initiated by a female.

The findings indicate it is not just characteristics of the subject which are important in making him react to crowding in one way or another. Important characteristics also reside in those with whom he is crowded. Perhaps crowding does not intensify our characteristic feelings so much as it intensifies our awareness of the characteristics of others.

References

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Freedman, J. L. Crowding and behavior. San Francisco: Freeman, 1975.

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Table 1

Mean Percent of Time Looking at Male and Female Confederates at Close and Far Distances

Distance	Confederate	
	Male	Female
Close	6.7	11.5
Far	12.1	12.5